

muscles to jelly and bones to splinters, it seems difficult to explain why the same thing should not happen in such cases as this, where an actual contact of the ball took place.*

Letter on Stramonium.

By Dr. Bree, author of a treatise on Disordered Respiration.

I very willingly comply with your request that I should report the result of my observations on the efficacy of stramonium in cases of asthma that have fallen under my view.

In certain cases I tried the extract of stramonium many years ago, but I was not encouraged by my experience at that time to pursue the practice of giving it in general cases of asthma.

In the last year the public were informed, by writers in journals and newspapers, that the smoking of this herb produced ease, and even effected cures in convulsive asthma. The authorities for such success were of a mixed character, some of them being satisfactory, as far as they reported benefit in the fits of asthma; but others, more numerous, were very suspicious, as they were not sanctioned by names, and most of them asserted cures after the use of the remedy for a very short time in this disease, of which the access of the paroxysm is both periodical and uncertain.

The evidence of advantage from smoking stramonium had a doubtful aspect to a considerate physician, and this character was not rendered more clear by the appearance of a "Familiar Treatise" on the subject, pretended to be published by Mr. Surgeon Fisher. Much of the matter in that treatise I knew to be wholly false, whilst the chief object of it was clearly displayed by the recommendation of stramonium in a *secret* composition, after the manner of other empirical nostrums.

* Since the above paragraph was written, we have noticed a remark made by Dr. Spence in the last number of the Edinburgh Journal, which conveys the same idea. Dr. S's paper relates to the wind of a ball. He seems inclined to attribute the effects imputed to it to a blow from some light substance impelled by the cannon ball with great velocity.

Mr. Toulmin, of Hackney, gave the only testimony that deserved attention respecting the use of stramonium in asthma; but this gentleman, with the power of confuting the pretensions of others, did not offer himself to the public notice; and the same reserve which distinguishes the professional man of science, seems to have restrained him from publishing hasty conclusions from particular facts, that are too often generalized and made subservient to unworthy purposes. I was acquainted, in a private manner, with Mr. Toulmin's use of stramonium by inhaling it; and the success which some sufferers had experienced in fits of asthma from following his practice, induced me to mention it as a possible means of obtaining relief, when other antispasmodics had been tried without effect.

From the beginning of the present year I have been more attentive to the effects of this practice.

The number of cases which I have had occasion to examine, between that period and the end of April, was 82. The patients were all disturbed in their breathing, but only a proportion of them was truly affected with convulsive asthma. To the whole number the remedy had been either useless, as regarded the removal of the disease, or it had produced injurious or fatal effects. If any signal advantage from the use of stramonium had been experienced, I should probably not have been consulted, and my report is therefore not intended to deny the success that may be asserted to have taken place in cases I have not seen. You will consider it as a faithful report respecting 82 cases of patients who had smoked this herb under various diseases, which were supposed to be asthmatic.

Those who had smoked stramonium without any permanent good effect amounted to 58. The remaining 24 had all of them been more or less injured, and some of them destroyed by the practice. I shall only mention cases which were brought to a certain state, admitting of safe inferences as to their further progress, at the end of April. They had been all of them observed with sufficient attention to enable me to ascertain how far stramonium was capable of mitigating or removing asthma.

The first list of 58 included 11 cases of obstructed liver; these patients had lost their time in relying upon stramonium; but I

do not place this inconvenience among the injuries derived from the practice of smoking this herb, because the constitutions of the patients were yet so vigorous as to be capable of bearing the necessary evacuations. All of them had constant dyspnœa, and most of them had experienced paroxysms of convulsive breathing at intervals. Three were in an advanced state of the disease, having hard bellies, and swelled legs. Seven gradually recovered by the treatment that was applied for the removal of congestion in the liver, their dyspnœa leaving them as the disease of this organ gave way. These 11 cases shew the effect of advice which people, ignorant of the distinction of diseases, give with confidence to their friends without any authority excepting that of the advertisements in the newspapers.

The remainder of the 58 patients had the usual signs of the asthmatic constitution. They were generally satisfied with a plan, less miraculous in the promise of immediate cure, but more likely to restore tone to their habits, and with the assurance that relieving the convulsive paroxysm of asthma is not removing the disease. I had seen many of them before, and some of these did not refrain from complaining of the assent I had given in the winter to their trials of stramonium in the difficulty they experienced of appeasing the fit.

The 24 patients who have been stated to have suffered injury from the smoking of stramonium were all disordered in the breathing, and their dyspnœa, at intervals, assumed the form of convulsive asthma.

Of this number I shall first mention seven patients, whose symptoms indicated phthisis, and whose lungs were weak, and had been long subject to inflammatory attacks on changes of weather, and the taking of colds. The oldest of these was 35 years of age. Their habits were thin, irritable, and weak; and the pulses of all of them, in their best state, of a dangerous quickness. In their former attacks of difficult respiration, small bleedings, with blisters and febrifuge draughts, that gently promoted expectoration, had always afforded relief. They came under my care in March and April, and all, without exception, attributed the aggravation of their complaints to the smoking of stramonium, or to the use internally of the oxymel of stramo-

nium. Some of these patients were relieved by the same means as had been before repeatedly applied to their cases, but three of them spat blood, after violent heat and stricture under the sternum had continued for many days. They now expectorate pus, and are greatly wasted with hectic fever and night sweats, and give no prospect of a fortunate result from any mode of treatment.

Three persons, who had passed the meridian of life, and had suffered asthmatic affections, and coughs, for many years, with great debility and emaciation of the system, experienced paralytic tremblings from smoking stramonium. Their original complaints were also generally aggravated, excepting their cough, which subsided as their weakness increased. The pulse in each of these patients was so lowered, that it became difficult to feel the beating of the artery. After abandoning their practice of smoking, which two of them had pursued every evening for two weeks, and one twice a day for ten days, they took strengthening draughts with gentle expectorants. The cough then returned to each patient, and they all recovered their former degree of health.

A lady advanced in life, of weak constitution, and particularly feeble nerves, had been long subject to coughs and asthma. She had smoked the stramonium a few times only, and it affected her head with pain and confusion, and her stomach with sickness. She was next seized with an epileptic fit, the first she had ever experienced. This attack was followed by three more fits of the same kind, at intervals of a few hours, and she became nearly insensible. The cough left her, the pulse became scarcely perceptible, and her mind was no longer capable of any exertion. She was not wholly unconscious of her state, but her stupor and somnolency overpowered the little energy she possessed, and her stools and urine passed involuntarily. At first it appeared necessary to remove congestion from the head by cupping, leeches, and blisters. Strengthening medicines were then employed in consultation with Dr. Latham. The patient slowly recovered from this critical state, and attributed her epileptic fits, and preceding confusion of head, to the smoking of stramonium.

Four persons, all of full habits, and two of them, strictly speaking, apoplectic in their forms, smoked stramonium for the cure of dyspnœa, which they called asthma. After some days experience of this practice, one of them was still capable of coughing, but with so much pain of his head as to indicate immediate danger. He was sixty years of age, and the other three were more than fifty. They so convincingly required depletion that I was surprised it had not been advised by the most superficial of their friends. Evacuations by bleeding and purging removed the difficulty of breathing, and probably preserved the lives of more than one.

The smoking of stramonium has been practised by many female patients. I saw two patients, of the ages of forty-five and forty-nine, of very plethoric habits, and each of them had experienced the inconvenience which so often follows the cessation of the menses. They wheezed much, and their breathing was oppressed upon every motion of their bodies. Without taking any measure pointed out by the actual condition of their habits, and from being informed only that they had asthma, they adopted the practice of smoking stramonium, and became rapidly worse. Pneumonic inflammation affected one, and intolerable headaches, with dimness of sight, attacked the other. They however obtained relief by the active application of the necessary treatment.

An elderly man, whose complicated disorders had begun with obstructed liver three years before, was icteric, and anasarcaous, with a hard belly, and irregular pulse, and had not lain horizontally for several weeks. His respiration was laborious, and he could not leave his bed without much increased agitation. I had seen him once, two weeks before; and I was called to him again in the present state. I found that he had been smoking stramonium for the last two days, and he died the night after I saw him without taking medicine.

Instances of patients in hydrothorax who had applied to the fumes of stramonium, must have occurred very often to practitioners in this town during the last three months. I have seen six cases of this kind, and I am confident that at least half of them were so quieted by the practice, the force of the circula-

tion through the lungs was so reduced, and the irritability of the frame so far exhausted, that they died prematurely as regarded the state of the disease.

The patients who suffer injurious or fatal consequences from smoking stramonium, are chiefly those who have apoplectic or paralytic habits ; young persons affected with insidious spasmodic breathing, but who are actually consumptive ; and elderly persons whose protracted complaints had ended in hydropic effusion in the chest. The effects of stramonium must be referred, as Cullen has remarked, to its narcotic power ; and if it be considered how universally the practice of smoking this herb has been diffused by the exertions of selfish interest, or of ignorant enthusiasm, the mischief that health and life have suffered from its use may be conceived, but cannot be very readily estimated.

I have had reported to me many deaths from smoking stramonium, and I have verified many facts of this kind, without attending to doubtful effects in cases that might have been lost without its influence. I do not go into these cases, but have spoken only of what I have seen.

Med. and Physical Journal.

Leeches.

These valuable animals having come into use in this part of the country but lately, a regular supply is obtained with difficulty. The following article from a *Pharmacopœia Chirurgica*, lately published, gives the necessary instructions for breeding and employing them.

The freedom with which topical blood-letting is now employed, may be considered as one of the improvements of modern surgery ; and in many cases one of the most effectual and least objectionable, is by the leech. These animals, however, are become so extremely dear, either from the exactions of those people who gather them, or by the monopoly of our drug merchants, that the patient is very frequently under the necessity of enduring his pain and sufferings from the utter impossibility of procuring what his surgeon has prescribed. To remedy this evil, every surgeon ought, so far as he has the means in his